Aviation Investigation Final Report

Location:	Kodiak, Alaska	**Accident Number:**	ANC21LA020
Date & Time:	March 2, 2021, 15:39 Local	**Registration:**	N1767
Aircraft:	ROBINSON HELICOPTER CO R66	**Aircraft Damage:**	Destroyed
Defining Event:	Unknown or undetermined	**Injuries:**	1 Fatal
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General aviation - Personal		

Analysis

The pilot, the sole occupant, was making a personal cross-country flight in the helicopter. According to flight tracking data, the helicopter departed and proceeded on course for about 1 hour 33 minutes. The flight track ended when the helicopter was about 70 nautical miles (nm) from its destination, over open ocean water, at an altitude of 394 ft mean sea level, and at a groundspeed of 132 knots. When the helicopter failed to arrive at its destination, family and friends contacted the Federal Aviation Administration and an extensive search was launched. During the search and rescue (SAR) operation, an inflated yellow pop-out float believed to be from the accident helicopter was located on the ocean surface. The search continued with additional SAR assets; however, minimal debris believed to be from the helicopter was observed in the water, and the search was suspended. Days after the accident, debris was discovered on the shore of an island about 42 nm north from the accident site and identified to be from the helicopter. Most of the helicopter was not located, and it is presumed to have sunk in the ocean waters. The pilot was not located, and an autopsy and toxicology test could not be performed.

Weather satellite imagery indicated that as the helicopter approached the vicinity of the accident site, it was likely operating in visual meteorological conditions beneath scattered-to-broken cloud cover. A weather station near the accident site reported wind gusting to 27 knots, which could have led to low-level wind shear conditions. Investigators were unable to determine the cause of the accident with the available information

Probable Cause and Findings

The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident to be:

An impact with ocean waters for reasons that could not be determined based on the available information.

Findings

Not determined	(general) - Unknown/Not determined

Factual Information

History of Flight

Enroute	Unknown or undetermined (Defining event)

On March 2, 2021, about 1539 Alaska standard time, a Robinson Helicopter Company R66 helicopter, N1767, was destroyed when it was involved in an accident about 70 nautical miles north of Kodiak, Alaska. The pilot, the sole occupant, was not located. The helicopter was operated as a Title 14 *Code of Federal Regulations* Part 91 personal flight.

According to the pilot's wife, her husband owned Kodiak Helicopters, LLC, which owned and operated the helicopter. She stated that he had requested the use of the helicopter from a company employee to make a trip to see family located in Kodiak. She added that they had just returned from an out-of-state trip, and after arriving in Anchorage, Alaska, her husband went directly to Merrill Field Airport (MRI), Anchorage, where the helicopter was located.

A pilot for Kodiak Helicopters reported that he was contacted earlier in the day by the accident pilot, who told him that he needed the helicopter for the next few days. According to the Kodiak Helicopters pilot, he flew the helicopter from Palmer, Alaska, to MRI and then filled the helicopter with fuel. He added that he had brief contact with the accident pilot while unloading his personal gear from the helicopter and that the accident pilot seemed distracted and was "not himself." Additionally, he said that the accident pilot mentioned that a local newspaper was set to publish a story about him within the next few hours, and he wanted to be with his family in Kodiak when the story broke.

According to the Kodiak Helicopters pilot, the helicopter departed from MRI at 1406 with a planned destination of Kodiak Airport (ADQ). The Kodiak Helicopters pilot said he viewed the helicopter's en route progress via Spidertracks (a real-time tracking system), and at 1539, the helicopter's Spidertracks data stopped in an area south of the Barren Islands over open ocean waters.

About 1630, the Kodiak Helicopters pilot and the pilot's wife began making inquiries to see if the helicopter had arrived in Kodiak. They were unable to locate the helicopter and contacted the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to initiate an organized search for the missing helicopter. An FAA Alert Notice (ALNOT) was issued, and an extensive search was launched.

During the search and rescue (SAR) operation, the United States Coast Guard (USCG) dispatched a rescue helicopter that located an inflated yellow pop-out float believed to be from the accident helicopter (see figure 1). The USCG stated that an emergency locator transmitter beacon was not received from the accident helicopter. No distress calls from the helicopter were reported. The search continued with additional SAR assets; however, minimal debris

believed to be from the helicopter was observed in the water, and the search was suspended on March 3, 2021, about 1130.

Figure 1. Inflated yellow pop-out float believed to be from the helicopter- (Photo courtesy of the USCG)

A review of the archived Spidertracks data revealed that after departure, the helicopter flew south down the Kenai Peninsula and then out over the ocean on course for Kodiak. At 1539, the last data point was recorded as the helicopter passed between Ushagat Island and West Amatuli Islands (two of the Barren Islands), at an altitude of 394 ft mean sea level (msl), on a heading of 186°, and at a groundspeed of 132 knots (see figure 2).

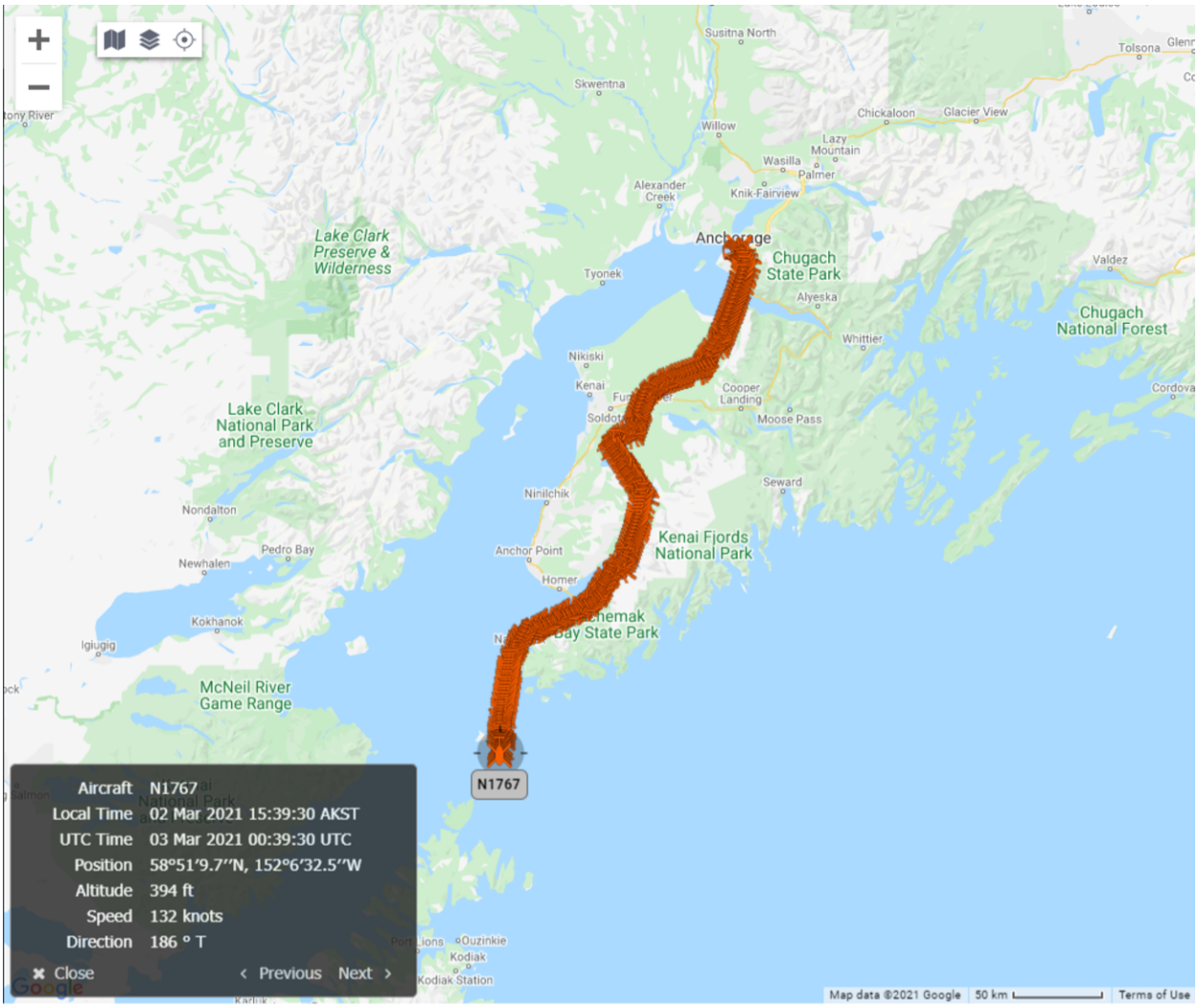

Figure 2. Spidertracks Data from Accident Flight

A review of FAA data indicated that there were no preflight weather briefings or air traffic services provided to the pilot.

Days after the accident, pilots of an air charter company based in Kodiak discovered debris on a beach near Afognak Island, Alaska, which is located about 42 nm north of Kodiak. The debris was recovered and found to be part of the helicopter's float, skid tube, and fuselage structure. No other wreckage was located.

The pilot's logbook was not available for review, and recent information on the flight history of the pilot could not be determined.

A review of the helicopter's maintenance logbooks revealed no outstanding discrepancies or irregularities.

Review of weather data indicated that an area of low cloud cover was located along most of the accident flight path on the western portion of the Kenai Peninsula. The observations from the

Seldovia Airport (PASO), Seldovia, Alaska, about 37 nautical miles north-northeast of the accident site, surrounding the accident time indicated marginal visual flight rules (MVFR) to instrument flight rules (IFR) conditions prevailed. Weather satellite imagery indicated that as the helicopter approached the Barren Islands, there was scattered to broken cloud cover.

A marine station located on East Amatuli Island, about 6 miles east-northeast of the accident site reported a northwest wind gusting to 27 knots at the time of the accident. At the time the helicopter passed near Nanwalek, Alaska, about 30 nautical miles north from the accident site, between 1523 to 1526, the south-facing FAA Aviation Weather Camera indicated cloud bases near or below 850 ft msl, while the southwest-facing FAA Aviation Weather Camera indicated cloud bases near but above 650 ft msl. Visibility below the cloud base was above 3 statute miles based on the south-facing camera imagery.

Pilot Information

Certificate:	Commercial	**Age:**	52,Male
Airplane Rating(s):	Single-engine land; Single-engine sea; Multi-engine land	**Seat Occupied:**	Unknown
Other Aircraft Rating(s):	Helicopter	**Restraint Used:**	Unknown
Instrument Rating(s):	Airplane; Helicopter	**Second Pilot Present:**	No
Instructor Rating(s):	None	**Toxicology Performed:**	
Medical Certification:	Class 1 With waivers/limitations	**Last FAA Medical Exam:**	May 8, 2020
Occupational Pilot:	No	**Last Flight Review or Equivalent:**	
Flight Time:	(Estimated) 2355 hours (Total, all aircraft)		

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	ROBINSON HELICOPTER CO	**Registration:**	N1767
Model/Series:	R66	**Aircraft Category:**	Helicopter
Year of Manufacture:	2015	**Amateur Built:**	
Airworthiness Certificate:	Normal	**Serial Number:**	0660
Landing Gear Type:	Emergency float; Skid	**Seats:**	5
Date/Type of Last Inspection:	April 7, 2020 Annual	**Certified Max Gross Wt.:**	
Time Since Last Inspection:		**Engines:**	1 Turbo shaft
Airframe Total Time:	190.6 Hrs as of last inspection	**Engine Manufacturer:**	ROLLS-ROYCE
ELT:	Installed, not activated	**Engine Model/Series:**	250-C300/A1
Registered Owner:	KODIAK HELICOPTERS LLC	**Rated Power:**	300 Horsepower
Operator:	On file	**Operating Certificate(s) Held:**	On-demand air taxi (135)

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:	Unknown	**Condition of Light:**	Day
Observation Facility, Elevation:	PASO,29 ft msl	**Distance from Accident Site:**	32 Nautical Miles
Observation Time:	15:23 Local	**Direction from Accident Site:**	35°
Lowest Cloud Condition:		**Visibility**	10 miles
Lowest Ceiling:	Overcast / 1000 ft AGL	**Visibility (RVR):**	
Wind Speed/Gusts:	4 knots /	**Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:**	Terrain-Induced / Unknown
Wind Direction:		**Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:**	Moderate / Unknown
Altimeter Setting:	29.16 inches Hg	**Temperature/Dew Point:**	-3°C / -5°C
Precipitation and Obscuration:	No Obscuration; No Precipitation		
Departure Point:	Anchorage, AK (MRI)	**Type of Flight Plan Filed:**	None
Destination:	Kodiak, AK (ADQ)	**Type of Clearance:**	None
Departure Time:	14:06 Local	**Type of Airspace:**	Class G

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	1 Fatal	**Aircraft Damage:**	Destroyed
Passenger Injuries:	N/A	**Aircraft Fire:**	Unknown
Ground Injuries:	N/A	**Aircraft Explosion:**	Unknown
Total Injuries:	1 Fatal	**Latitude, Longitude:**	58.872527,-152.13761(est)

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Swenson, Eric
Additional Participating Persons:	David Longan; FAA; Juneau, AK Thom Webster; Robinson Helicopter Company; Torrance, CA
Original Publish Date:	September 14, 2022
Last Revision Date:	
Investigation Class:	Class 3
Note:	The NTSB did not travel to the scene of this accident.
Investigation Docket:	https://data.ntsb.gov/Docket?ProjectID=102702

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) is an independent federal agency charged by Congress with investigating every civil aviation accident in the United States and significant events in other modes of transportation—railroad, transit, highway, marine, pipeline, and commercial space. We determine the probable causes of the accidents and events we investigate, and issue safety recommendations aimed at preventing future occurrences. In addition, we conduct transportation safety research studies and offer information and other assistance to family members and survivors for each accident or event we investigate. We also serve as the appellate authority for enforcement actions involving aviation and mariner certificates issued by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and US Coast Guard, and we adjudicate appeals of civil penalty actions taken by the FAA.

The NTSB does not assign fault or blame for an accident or incident; rather, as specified by NTSB regulation, "accident/incident investigations are fact-finding proceedings with no formal issues and no adverse parties … and are not conducted for the purpose of determining the rights or liabilities of any person" (Title 49 *Code of Federal Regulations* section 831.4). Assignment of fault or legal liability is not relevant to the NTSB's statutory mission to improve transportation safety by investigating accidents and incidents and issuing safety recommendations. In addition, statutory language prohibits the admission into evidence or use of any part of an NTSB report related to an accident in a civil action for damages resulting from a matter mentioned in the report (Title 49 *United States Code* section 1154(b)). A factual report that may be admissible under 49 *United States Code* section 1154(b) is available here.